4: Cross L-5 (no date) 1948 E16 Slavs E16

was the husband of a Greek princess, and the son of this union eventually became the consort of Gytha, daughter of the Saxon Harold who fell at Hastings in 1066. Kiev was thus united with contemporary European states by a series of dynastic alliances foreshadowing the customs of modern times.

Yet for all his power and wealth, Yaroslav governed by the same simple mechanism that had prevailed under Vladimir. The prince won his position by force and maintained it by personal supremacy, supported by Varangian mercenaries recruited from Scandinavia whenever domestic levies proved insufficient or disloyal, and consulting with his chief military aides, with the city elders, or with church dignitaries on matters of general policy. Yaroslav began the codification of customary civil and ecclesiastical law, encouraged both translations and original literature, and endeavored without success to emancipate the Russian Church from the Byzantine patriarchate. By his crushing victory over the nomad Pechenegs before the walls of Kiev in 1036, he made the marches of his principality safe for thirty-five years.

Beside rebuilding his father's Church of the Tithe after it was damaged by fire in 1017, he carried out a large-scale construction program which made Kiev one of the most notable medieval cities. His great cathedral of Saint Sophia in Kiev, with its five apses and thirteen cupolas, still contains the largest extant yardage of eleventh-century Byzantine frescoes and a series of remarkably preserved mosaics of impressive beauty. This is the one medieval Russian church which has been exhaustively studied by American archaeologists in coöperation with native Russian colleagues.

The underlying weakness of the Kievan principality lay in the fact that its stability was assured only by the prestige and ability of the ruling prince. There was as yet no sentiment of solidarity, national unity, and group interest which guaranteed that the whole system would not be overthrown by some ambitious and resolute rival from among the kindred princes in outlying cities loosely subject to the authority of the prince of Kiev and envious of his power and wealth.

4: Cross L-5 (no date) 1948 E16 Slavs E16

younger state in a volume which might have served as a firm basis for the development of a characteristic native culture. The Russians before the Tartar invasion were always pupils; they originated very little that was independent of Byzantine models either in literature or in art.

In art, however, this imitation was productive and created an architectural and a decorative tradition which lasted down into modern times. By the date of Vladimir's conversion, the basilica as a type of church architecture in Byzantium had been largely replaced by the cruciform church with one or with five cupolas. This was the type transmitted to Russia and still worthily represented by the great medieval churches of Kiev, Novgorod, Vladimir and even Moscow, though in the metropolis the more exotic forms and the onion-shaped dome derived from wooden architecture prevail. The highly conventionalized art of the icon dominated Russian painting until Western influences began to seep in during the seventeenth century, but this tradition was still vital enough before the first World War to influence the art of nineteenth-century religious and historical painters. For where the Byzantine tradition had taken firm root, the aesthetic appeal was long-lived and enduring.

In literature, along with lapidary works of religious implication, the Russian national spirit began to manifest itself in historical compilations during the eleventh century, and literary reflexes of folk poetry had already appeared before the Tartar conquest. But a truly national literature stems from a long educative process, and this process was interrupted in medieval Russia both by domestic politics and by nomadic inroads.

Where domestic disorders merely retarded the intellectual advance of medieval Russia, the Tartar incursion brought it to a full stop. It has already been noticed what material impoverishment it had caused. But the Tartar domination was a far more serious factor in the deterioration of cultural and spiritual values. The church, to be sure, was treated with tolerance by the Tartars because it preached submission to

10: French S-4 (no date) 1951 E16 Slavic Peoples E16

CHAPTER IX

THE ICONS

778
532

ALLUSION has been made more than once in this book to the icons; but such is their importance in Orthodox piety that it may be well to devote a short chapter to them.

An icon is a picture of a sacred subject painted upon a panel of wood of varying size. The surface is prepared with a mixture of powdered alabaster and glue beneath which linen is sometimes stretched, and the colours laid on with the yolk of egg as a medium.[1] The finished panel was in many cases furnished later on with a covering of metal, precious or base, which completely hides the painting, except the flesh parts, to reveal which holes were cut in the metal. The rest of the picture, or at least its main lines, are reproduced in the metal cover by *répoussée*. Further embellishment may be added, in the form of haloes and different kinds of pendants. The icon may be adorned with precious stones, some famous examples being encrusted with a wealth of them.

It has been generally accepted that the icon is derived from the funerary portraits of the dead which were placed upon mummies in Egypt.[2] Perhaps by way of usage in connection with the martyrs, and devotion to their shrines, the use of icons spread in time throughout the Orthodox world and became a characteristic feature of Orthodox piety.

The painting of icons was a work of religion as well as a work of art, the painter preparing himself for his task by prayer and other spiritual exercises. In modern times the provision of vast numbers of cheap icons may have degener-

[1] For details in the technique of icon-painting see Minns-Kondakov: *The Russian Icon*, Oxford, 1927.

[2] See, however, A. Frolow: *Revue des Études Byzantines*, Tome VI, 1948, p. 125.

10: French S-4 (no date) 1951 E16 Slavic Peoples E16

ated into a mere trade, but ideally, and to a large extent in actual fact, the production of them has been and still is the pious activity of monks. The monasteries were the great workshops in which icons were produced, and although icons are nearly always anonymous, the known painters of these highly venerated objects were themselves greatly revered.

The subjects depicted on the icon are many and various. It may be a single figure; of Christ, the Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist (winged, as the Precursor), or some other saint. It may be a group of figures, a picture of a scriptural or ecclesiastical incident, or the representation of an abstruse theological idea. Miracles, Martyrdoms, Councils of the Church, are drawn by the icon-painter's brush. An icon may even represent the veneration of another icon by some eminent prelate.

The icon-painter did not profess, with possibly some very rare exceptions, to be making a portrait, though the general aspect of a saint will be the same on every icon of him. Nor, in the great days of icon-painting, was realistic truth to nature conceived as an aim. The painter did not produce the illusion of depth, perspective was often reversed, and the niceties of anatomical knowledge ignored. Realism came in with the decadence of the art of icon-painting.

The men who made the icons in the great days of Byzantium and at the zenith of Russian icon-painting in fifteenth-century Novgorod were doing two things. They were decorating a flat surface and they were seeking to convey in line and colour an aspect of divine truth. At their best they achieved both those purposes supremely well.

They painted within the framework of rules about the way that this or that person should be represented, which belonged to the very core of the tradition of icon-painting. Such rules, often concerned with a surprising degree of detail, were embodied in manuals of instruction which circulated among the workshops.

Hence the immediate impression that the numberless icons of any particular subject are "all alike". But it is possible to exaggerate this similarity and to over-rate the influence of the manuals. The great examples of icon-painting reveal

10: French S-4 (no date) 1951 E16 Slavic Peoples E16

the fact that the rules left room for the expression of individual inspiration and the exercise of creative power, as the painter set about his task of adorning a given surface with a vision of divine truth.

As the icons vary in their subject matter, so they vary also in their artistic merit. Some are supreme works of art, many are of great beauty, superb in their composition, rhythm of line and glowing colour. Many others have little aesthetic value, and the icon may even degenerate into a cheap oleograph stuck on a piece of wood.

But the veneration in which they are held is independent of these considerations. Some measure of it may be found in the ubiquity of icons in an Orthodox country. They are not only in churches, but also in public buildings of all kinds, in private houses and shops. There is a recognized position for the icon in a room, and the visitor will salute it on entering, just as he greets his host. Schools, regiments, clubs and the like will adopt their own icons. The devout will carry an icon with them when they travel, and have it before them when they say their prayers. Well-to-do people may accumulate their family icons from generation to generation. The first thing the Orthodox worshipper does on entering his church is to salute the icons, or, at least, such of them as may claim his particular devotion. He bows before them, crosses himself, says a prayer, kisses the icon, and perhaps sets a lighted candle before it in the stand provided for the purpose. He then moves away to wherever he wishes to stand for the service if there is one, or to leave the church and go about his business.

Plainly we are here in a realm which readily lends itself to capture by popular religion. Popular religion, whatever the field in which it expresses itself, the use of the Bible, the singing of subjective and emotional hymns, the veneration of icons, or anything else, may easily use the thing it has captured, in a way which others call superstition, and which may indeed be such.

But before the Westerner draws hasty general conclusions about the Orthodox practice before the icons, he should reflect that the Orthodox approaches the icon with premises in his mind which he himself probably does not share.